

Nettalk

Free East Timor Coalition

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Skyhawk Contract deals NZ into arms exports to Indonesia



"New Zealand exporters, such as Blenheim company Safe Air Ltd, are continuing to do an outstanding job in challenging times," according to prime minister Jenny Shipley who on October 2 presented a Trade New Zealand Export Commendation Award to Safe Air as a 'smart' company.

On the same day ETIC Auckland condemned the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs for giving Government clearance to Safe Air for the refurbishment of Skyhawk jets.

This contract, worth millions of dollars, is to undertake extensive improvements and modifications to two Skyhawk aircraft recently imported to

New Zealand from the United States. These aircraft will be delivered to Indonesia and initially used for training of Indonesian airforce personnel.

New Zealand has effectively become an arms exporter to Indonesia. This is happening without any consultation with the New Zealand people,

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Skyhawk Contract deals NZ into arms exports to Indonesia

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and at the very time when the United States is passing legislation to restrict arms sales to Indonesia to exclude the possibility that any arms could be used in East Timor.

Skyhawk aircraft are configured and intended for ground attack and for bombing. The use of Skyhawks against civilian populations has been extensively documented by eyewitness reports from East Timor. Skyhawks were used in the bombing attacks on mountain villages that took place in 1978 and again in the 1983-84 "Operation Persatuan" when the villages were bombed with anti-personnel, cluster and incendiary devices.

There is a massive new troop build-up in East Timor, and in a recent offensive against the resistance there was an unsuccessful attempt to capture resistance leader Taur Matan Ruak. Essentially

East Timor is at a cross-roads — Indonesia has taken only a tiny step along the path of negotiation and dialogue and could easily resort again to repression and military crackdown. New Zealand could play a powerful role for peace, as it has been invited to do by jailed resistance leader, Xanana Gusmao.

However, any potential for peacemaking must surely be undermined by the export of arms or military hardware to Indonesia. Regardless of whether our technological expertise and equipment helps with actual bombing or training in bombing, New Zealand cannot be considered neutral or impartial, but instead to be complicit with the Indonesian military.

The *New Zealand Herald* briefly recorded our concerns in items on October 2 and 3 — and our view that the contract represented "a quantum leap" in New Zealand's military ties with Indonesia. *

Indonesia's offer of autonomy — a Clayton's deal?

Indonesia has acknowledged the need for change in East Timor, and the outcome of the recent United Nations talks between the Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal has been labeled as a breakthrough. The optimism is still premature.

It is true that the two sides agreed to continue the talks on autonomy "without prejudice to their basic positions of principle" with the hope that an agreement can be reached by the end of the year. There is an agreement about renewing diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Portugal in the form of "interest sections" — representation in each other's capital in the Embassy of a friendly country.

Jakarta is trying to have the best of both worlds by giving the international community a new appearance of flexibility while in fact conceding lit-

tle. The form of autonomy proposed for East Timor excludes from local control, defence, foreign affairs and economic management.

Exiled resistance leader, José Ramos Horta rejects what he calls "lip service" autonomy. "After a 23-year history of rapes and killings and oppression, the people of East Timor will not be fooled by cosmetic arrangements."

The resistance is united in demanding a referendum and the release of Xanana Gusmao. José Ramos Horta suggests that there could be a preparatory period before a referendum of up to three years, but in the meantime an autonomous East Timor Parliament must be given control of domestic affairs including financial affairs. Leaving economic management to Indonesia, according to José Ramos Horta would be like "leaving Imelda Marcos in charge of the shoe shop". *

Journalist Killings at Balibo — Truth at Last

On Monday August 24 the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a dramatic story about the cover up of the deaths of five journalists at Balibo in East Timor on October 16, 1975, two months before Indonesia's full scale invasion of East Timor.

According to the Herald "the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has systematically concealed its detailed foreknowledge of the Indonesian attack at Balibo."

The killing of the five journalists — Brian Peters and Malcolm Rennie of Channel 9 in Sydney, and (New Zealander) Gary Cunningham, Greg Shackleton and Tony Stewart of Channel 7 in Melbourne, created a huge dilemma for both Australia and New Zealand since both were keen to turn a blind eye to Indonesia's active intervention.

Although it could be said that the focus on this issue is out of proportion with the suffering and death of over 200,000 East Timorese, getting to the truth about this tragedy shines a powerful light on western complicity with Indonesia's war plans.

The Herald's inquiry showed:

- That Canberra knew about the Balibo attack three days before it happened because of detailed information given to Embassy staff by Indonesian intelligence officials. The existence of a cable from then Ambassador Woolcott, relaying this information has been independently confirmed.
- The attack was not a border skirmish largely between irregular Timorese forces with some Indonesian assistance on one side, as Australian Foreign Affairs still portrays it, but part of an invasion by some 3,200 Indonesian troops.
- It was known that the journalists were "outside Dili" in Timor, but no attempts were made to warn them or their TV channel bosses, let alone to intervene with Jakarta to save the group.
- Australian Foreign Affairs encouraged the bereaved families to agree to a burial in Jakarta for fear an Australian funeral could stir up "anti-Indonesian campaign" and "public outrage".

- The 1995-96 inquiry by a former government lawyer, Tom Sherman, failed to interview any of the Australian officials who were handling Timor affairs in 1975.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* gives a poignant description of the funeral describing this as perhaps "the shabbiest exercise of all". On November 12, 1975, the head of the Indonesian intelligence agency BAKIN, handed over four shoe boxes of charred bone fragments said to be the remains of the journalists, along with some camera equipment, notes and personal effects, including Greg Shackleton's diary.

To the subsequent regret of some of them, the shocked families accepted the advice not to have the remains brought home, and instead all were buried in a Jakarta cemetery, in a single coffin, in a ceremony attended by several embassy staff and resident journalists.

Subsequently, a former senior police officer, Mr Dos Santos, now living in exile in Portugal, revealed his knowledge of an assassination list to the Indonesian human rights group, Tapol. In his latest revelations, he said: "Two or three days before the attack on Balibo, the Indonesians had a list of eight people they wanted to kill in Balibo including the five journalists. They (the Indonesians) used to listen to Fretilin radio. In one of the reports the Fretilin referred to the journalists being in Balibo. This was before the attack."

ETIC Auckland in a Media Release called for a new enquiry into the massacre of the journalists and for New Zealand to support this enquiry by opening its diplomatic and intelligence records of the time.✻

In our last issue (no. 12) we published an article on the New Zealand economic links with Indonesia. This article was only possible through the help and support of the Campaign against Foreign Control in Aotearoa (CAFCA).

Activist visits East Timor as Suharto departs



Dougal Ellis, Auckland East Timor activist, visited East Timor in late May 1998 at a time of dramatic upheaval.

I recently spent three weeks in East Timor. Having been involved in the issue and last year writing a thesis on New Zealand's response to East Timor, it was a trip filled with trepidation. I was nervous as hell as the plane circled and landed at Dili airport. Luckily my friend and I arrived at probably the best time in the last 23 years, five days after Suharto had resigned. Timor was buzzing with the possibility of Xanana being released and reports of international pressure for Habibie to resolve the Timor issue.

The military presence in Dili at that time, so the locals said, was less obvious. ABRI (Indonesian military) was more occupied with events in Jakarta. When we arrived Kopassus troops were on standby in a boat in the harbour ready to make

the trip to Java if needed.

The first few days can only be described as paranoid. Young men often approached us offering to be our guides and warning us about spies. Some were spies, some weren't, we had no way of knowing. By the end of the trip however we got quite good at spotting the Intel agents especially when they wore mirror shades and their first question was "Where are you staying?" We were also worried about being followed and having our room searched as we had a video camera and by the end, some sensitive footage.

We travelled as much as possible over East Timor passing from north to south and east to west. Place names such as Ramelau mountain,

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Activist visits East Timor as Suharto departs

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Maubisse, Santa Cruz, Same and Bacau evoked many memories for me of horror stories familiar to anyone who has read about East Timor. The military presence in the country side is much more obvious. Even villages far from anywhere host army or police barracks and the army maintains check points on certain roads. Visitors are required to register with the police when they arrive in a new town and in some places we definitely got the impression we were not welcome.

The Timorese are poor. Most of them are still subsistence farmers, practising an environmentally damaging slash and burn agriculture. Timor is definitely underdeveloped lacking a tourist industry and private investment. The years of conflict have much to do with this. Traditional architecture and craft is also absent in many villages. A priest in Los Palos claimed there are plenty of schools in East Timor but no teachers or resources. Furthermore, for many poor families even the nominal schooling fee was difficult to raise. Health suffered from a lack of medicine. The sister in

charge of the Los Palos Catholic Clinic said malnutrition was the main health problem.

We didn't meet anyone outside of the army, police or the government who expressed a desire for integration. The student body is very political and pushing for a referendum. Similarly many of the clergy embrace political action. As one priest in Dili told us "the people want freedom and the church's role is to support the people". We interviewed a number of former prisoners. They were mostly young people who had been imprisoned for their political activities. They showed us scars on their bodies and told us horror stories of torture and beatings. Many of them had been incarcerated for long periods. In the end we had to call a halt to the interviews. There were too many people wanting to tell their story and we had neither the skills nor the resources to deal with them. We also worried that our footage and notes would be confiscated.

Now, when people say that East Timor is a "complex issue", that human rights abuses are "unconfirmed" and that East Timor is "divided" between pro and anti integration factions, I can say "bullshit!" and when they ask me if I've been there I can say "yes I have". *

Visit of East Timorese Activist — Virgilio da Silva Guterres

Virgilio, originally from Baucau, is an activist with Renetil — National Resistance of East Timor Students — in Jakarta. He came to Aotearoa to represent Xanana Gusmão at the University of Auckland's "Indonesia Beyond Suharto" Conference on September 9 and 10.

Virgilio was jailed for 2 years and 4 months in the Cipinang jail in Jakarta for his role in organising a Jakarta demonstration following the Dili massacre in 1991.

Virgilio had successful meetings in Whangarei, Auckland and Wellington (see page 11) and did extensive networking with Church, human rights and student groups during his five week stay. Virgilio met Foreign Affairs staff, several MPs and was interviewed by a number of media including

student and church newspapers.

There were productive discussions around the possibility of a special scholarship for an East Timorese to study in New Zealand. A precedent was set for this type of scholarship by the NZUSA scholarship which supported South African activists studying in New Zealand during the apartheid era.

Funds are also sought for an independent Foundation in Indonesia which supports East Timorese studying in Indonesia.

Virgilio is optimistic that New Zealand can play a role in supporting peace-making and future development projects in East Timor. He urges us to continue with our efforts to end the military training links and the export of refurbished Skyhawks to Indonesia. *

A Solution for East Timor

On September 10, 1998, a paper prepared by Xanana Gusmão in Cipinang Prison was presented at the "Beyond Suharto" Conference organised by the New Zealand Asia Institute, University of Auckland. Through his representative Virgilio da Silva Guterres, Xanana was for the first time able to air his views before an international audience of activists, academics, government and NGO officials. The following is an abridged version of that speech.

Change is coming

It is common knowledge that the occupation of East Timor has been, indeed still is, very lucrative for members of the Suharto family and some Indonesian generals. Income has been substantial. However expenditure is also substantial, and with the economic crisis, is becoming a huge burden. Military analysts estimate that over one billion US dollars are spent on direct military costs per year in East Timor. Indonesia now realises that costs must be cut, but equally that their face must be saved. So what is their strategy?

Autonomy or independence?

The right to self-determination of the East Timorese people still exists. It is not negotiable.

In recent declarations Ali Alatas has presented this "autonomy" proposal as the solution to the conflict. Has he abandoned his former arrogant claim, that "integration is something not to be discussed?" Does he not now replace it with the equally arrogant claim that autonomy is the only option to be discussed? Is this his way of cutting costs, while saving face?

Such a concept of autonomy sounds like a concession from a sovereign power which is allowing some devolution of power to one of its constituent parts. This is totally false. East Timor was militarily annexed by Indonesia, and is not part of Indonesia. The act of pseudo-legal integration that took place in May 1976 on a small bridgehead of conquered East Timorese land occurred at the very time that the majority of us were fighting against integration, as we are still fighting it today. Indonesia is an invader, no more! Just as Iraq was in Kuwait.

Negotiations

Dialogue needs to be open and earnest, and oriented towards the possibility of reaching compromises that satisfy all parties. The joint communiqué issued on 5 August 1998 by the United Nations, Portugal and Indonesia, at the conclusion of the recent ministerial

talks in New York, shows some positive steps in this direction.

I welcome the opening of "special interest sections" allowing for the presence of a Portuguese diplomat in Indonesia and vice-versa. The Indonesian government did not object, as they did previously, to the UN Secretary-General's consulting directly with East Timorese leaders. These are small steps forward.

Another important discussion point was the Intra East Timorese Dialogue planned for October. It is right that Indonesia no longer forbids the discussion of the political status of the territory at this Dialogue, for this is in fact the very kernel of the problem. In addition, Indonesia should stop claiming that all Dialogue participants coming from Indonesia are pro-integration; they are not — while all those living abroad are anti-integration. Those taking part in the Dialogue should be greater in number, and also more representative of those East Timorese who live inside East Timor. The voice of East Timorese people living inside East Timor has not been heard. Most deserving of a voice are the youth, the spokespersons for the aspirations of today's East Timorese. Here is an important consulting role for Mr Jamsheed Marker, Mr Kofi Annan's Special Representative.

Referendum

There can be no genuine solution to the East Timor problem without a referendum.

If Indonesia does withdraw, as they are legally obliged to, then a referendum is in fact unnecessary. But let us hold a referendum, in order to show the world and particularly the Indonesians, the strength of our unity, and the intensity of our desire to be East Timorese. But that referendum must be held soon, as the youth of East Timorese so loudly demand. If we wait, who knows who the next Indonesian president may be? A general? Who will have the power to shift the Indonesian army out of East Timor when Indonesia regains its economic balance? Can we withstand, for ever, the "bribe and



Xanana Gusmão in Cipinang Prison

divide" strategy of the Indonesian army? Indeed can we trust the Indonesians at all?

Beware of troop increases

As a conciliatory gesture at the time of the ministerial talks, Mr Alatas pointed to Indonesia's reduction in Indonesian armed forces in East Timor. In August, journalists were flown to Dili at Indonesian government expense to watch and film 1,000 Indonesian troops — later reduced to 400 — boarding ships to return home to Indonesia. Later seen on television, this was the beginning of a large troop reduction program, said Mr Alatas. Ladies and gentlemen, do not believe it. It is a false claim which is completely in line with similar false claims that have been made by Indonesia since 1980. The truth is this. Since the filming of this troop withdrawal, a total of 3,500 troops have taken their place. No cameramen were invited to watch their arrival, for they landed at secret army jetties at Viqueque, Com

and Carabelo, near Vemasse. Fighting is continuing at this very moment, alongside repression and torture. Not an inch of ground has been yielded by the Indonesians, not a single tangible concession. The fight continues, but we need, more than ever at this decisive point in our history, the influence and weight that the liberal democratic world can give.

Survival as a small country

Some of you may wonder how such a small territory as East Timor, with such formidable neighbours as Indonesia, can survive as an independent state. New Zealand seems to me a shining example of how this can be done. Over the years, your country has grown to become the most important power in the South Pacific.

The East Timorese can learn a lot from your experience. New Zealand's technical know how, its knowledge of the region, and its sensitivity to its original peoples, give it a key role in contributing valuable inputs and assistance to East Timorese reconstruction and development. Indeed, your country has already demonstrated its commitment to peace and harmony between nation states in the region, through the brokering of a Peace Agreement in Bougainville.

For these reasons, and because your country cannot be perceived as having any vested interest in the conflict, I do believe, that New Zealand is in a strong position to play a decisive peace-making role in negotiations to come. We invite you to do so. We also welcome the entry of New Zealand companies in the exploitation of our natural resources, and your expertise in helping to develop services and training in the huge task of nation-building which we hope lies not far round the corner.

An independent East Timor

So that you can see the shape of our small but independent Republic of East Timor on the horizon, may I give you five small insights?

First, East Timor will be a neighbourly country. A United Nations member, we will focus upon regional friendliness, with applications for membership with ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), and the South Pacific Forum. Particularly will we foster strong ties with democratic New Zealand and Australia. The Portuguese speaking countries of Brazil, Mozambique, Angola and Portugal will always be our cultural neighbours.

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Xanana's speech

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Second, East Timor will be a democratic country, a multi-party democracy. Underlying this democracy, and essential to it, will be a judicial system which is independent of the government.

Third, East Timor will be a peace-promoting country. East Timor will have no armed forces, will ban the use of firearms within its borders, and vigorously promote reconciliation amongst its citizens.

Fourth, East Timor will be a developing country, eager to develop its oil and minerals, its farmland, its tree crops, its coffee, its cattle, its fisheries, and above all its tourist attractions.

Fifth, East Timor will be a country which cares for its people, and whose people are listened to. Its people will be educated, given back their health, and helped to gain employment and derive a livelihood from their land. The people's daily culture, and its many languages, will be valued and once again be handed back to the people.

Conclusion

Time has been on our side, but at a huge cost of life, misery and poverty ... Armed brutality cannot destroy our spirit, or the feeling for our distinctive East Timorese identity. But I stress, this feeling is not for sale. Please therefore, take our vision for East Timor and our solution for peace, and then, if it is in your heart to do so, fight alongside us to realise it. Thank you.

Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão

Chinese Indonesians Raped

On the 9 August, the Chinese community turned out around the country to show their support for the "yellow ribbon" campaign — the international campaign to draw attention to the atrocities experienced by Chinese women in Jakarta at the time of the May riots.

The 2,000 strong crowd in Aotea Square — representing a broad cross-section of Chinese community groups in Auckland — mirrored similar rallies held around the world.

An estimated 170 Chinese women were systematically targeted for gang rape of whom about 20 subsequently died. The graphic and disturbing eyewitness accounts of the rapes and deaths include information that suggests direct military involvement in the abuses. Truckloads of men in military boots and with crew cuts appeared in Chinese neighbourhoods inciting the crowds to attack, loot, and burn properties often with the residents inside.

Orchestrating anti-Chinese feeling has been a traditional scapegoat tactic of the Indonesian administration and the former Dutch colonial Government in times of hardship.

In August President Habibie expressed his "deep regret" for the May violence and the rapes,

but the perpetrators remain unidentified and unpunished. At the same time Habibie makes capital out of anti-Chinese business sentiment, deflecting awareness from the Suharto family and transnational control over the Indonesian economy.

ETIC Auckland told Defence Minister Max Bradford to call a halt to all further military training of Indonesian soldiers, stressing that we should support the victimised Chinese people in Indonesia as well as the East Timorese." *

Demonstrations in Dili

For three days in succession (October 10-13) mass demonstrations paralysed Dili as the people staged first, a strike, and then mass demonstrations of at least 25,000 people. The people mobilised against Governor Soares and his threat that public servants supporting the referendum movement would be sacked, and against the new military offensive. *

Fr Terry Dibble visits East Timor

Terry Dibble visited East Timor for three weeks in September 98 as the guest of the Salesian Fathers. He tells of a student who attended a meeting in Los Palos organised by the Governor, Chief of Police, Army Commander and local mayor to promote autonomy. The student said he welcomed the chance to hold a free discussion and asked if he could test the feeling of the meeting. "Viva autonomy" he shouted — no response. Then: "Viva referendum" — and everyone in the audience enthusiastically echoed the call.

The majority of the population live in thatched huts and survive on what they grow. If crops fail, they starve. Basic diet is rice or corn, supplemented by some vegetables. Comparatively small numbers of Water buffalo, goats, Jerusalem sheep, pigs, chicken and a little fish provide the occasional protein. The provision of clean water is a major concern. Women often have to carry water considerable distances.

Outside Dili and the main townships, there is little in the way of commercial economy. Tropical forest has been clear-felled. Most of the prized sandalwood timber has gone. Some forest is regenerating, but much of the landscape is dominated by tussock which is annually burned off to encourage re-growth.

Malaria and TB are rife. These and other diseases weaken the people and prevent them from working effectively. While some medical facilities staffed by Indonesians are available, the people distrust the Indonesians and are reluctant to use the facilities.

Education is a disaster. Children are required to go to school, but the teachers are mostly poorly trained, often attend irregularly and have very few teaching aids.

There are many orphanages in East Timor, a product of military atrocities and also of poverty. Some families are too poor to support their children.

I discovered that there is a high expectation among Timorese that they will become independent in the foreseeable future ... The overwhelming response of the people is for "Referendum" — that is an internationally monitored plebiscite that would allow the people to express their will concerning sovereignty. The outcome of such a vote is a foregone conclusion. The people of East



Terry at the Salesian school at Fuiloro

Timor want New Zealand to be an advocate of the "Referendum" proposal in international arenas.

Some East Timorese people are aware that New Zealand took an active part in achieving a peace agreement in Bougainville. I was asked whether New Zealand could take a similar initiative in their favour. They have a greater trust in New Zealand than Australia, largely because they see Australia as compromised by deals done with Indonesia, in particular, the joint arrangement for the exploitation of the Timor Gap oil fields.

Looking beyond independence, they hope that New Zealand could send peacekeeping troops to East Timor to promote reconciliation and counteract violence against people who have been known to collaborate with the invaders.

Three main areas where they look for assistance:

- Education: resources — teacher training
- Health: Medical resources and training
- Agriculture: reforestation to recover the natural ecology. *

Indonesia — Protests continue

In Indonesia student protest is stepping up again despite heavy police and military intimidation.

For example, in a mid September march on parliament over 1,000 students from two private universities demanded a thorough investigation into Suharto's wealth and protested at the soaring prices of essentials. When a security cordon

blocked their way, they sat on the three-lane avenue, blocking traffic, and held a free speech forum to air their grievances before disbanding peacefully.

Indonesian military chief Wiranto pledged that the armed forces "will not hesitate to act sternly against demonstrators" who make the rest of the country "restless." *

US restrictions on military training and weapons sales

Both the US Senate and the US House of Representatives voted in September to maintain the restrictions on arms sales to Indonesia. The restrictions are part of foreign policy appropriations that US weaponry sold to Indonesia must not be used in East Timor. Both the House and the Sen-

ate have also supported a referendum on self-determination in East Timor.

Congress has subsequently approved legislation to ban the Pentagon from training troops that have participated in committing human rights abuses. The bill has gone to the President for signature.*

Timor Gap oil production begins

In July BHP, on behalf of its joint venture participants announced the start of production in its Elang, Kakatua and Kakatua North oil fields located in the Zone of Co-operation area in the Timor Sea.

The combined reserves are 29 million barrels of light, low sulphur crude oil. Over a four-year period a peak flow rate of 32,500 barrels is expected to be achieved.

Under the terms of the Timor Gap Treaty between Australia and Indonesia a share of the profits from this oil will flow to Indonesia. The National Council for Timorese Resistance has demanded that the funds destined for Indonesia be placed in a special trust fund by the Timor Gap Authority for the people of East Timor, pending an internationally just resolution of the East Timor conflict.

There are some indication BHP may be laying groundwork for future change — setting up a partnership with World Vision to study possible development projects in East Timor.



The reserves of the Elang Kakatua field will shortly be dwarfed by the production of natural gas from the far larger Undan-Bayu reserve. It is imperative that the unjust Timor Gap Treaty which ignores the rights of the East Timorese be renegotiated.*

East Timor Case Pushed in Wellington

Virgilio da Silva Gutterres (Gill) met with group members and others at Trades Hall, Wellington, on Monday September 14, where he gave an update on the current situation both in Indonesia, where he is currently based, and in East Timor.

Gill described the creation of a Foundation which is being set up to provide for East Timorese youth to obtain tertiary qualifications in medicine, political science, environmental studies, agricultural studies, architecture and so on. This will help to ensure that East Timor is well placed to deal with independence, and the skills that will be required, when it eventuates. The Wellington group is looking at ways in which it can assist the Foundation.

Gill also met with Laila Harré, Alliance MP, with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the NZ University Students Association, the Victoria University Wellington Students Association, and the Maori Students Association. He was interviewed by *City Voice* and the university newspaper *Salient*.

Gill arrived just days after the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Don McKinnon, had told Indonesia that New Zealand would welcome the release of Xanana Gusmão.

What we need to do now is to get the Govern-



ment to go the whole way with its policy by declaring that East Timor should be granted full independence, that all political prisoners should be freed, and that the occupying troops to be sent home.

We look forward to further visits, from Gill and from others who give their time and their lives to the cause of justice, peace and freedom for the people of East Timor.*

ETA, Wellington

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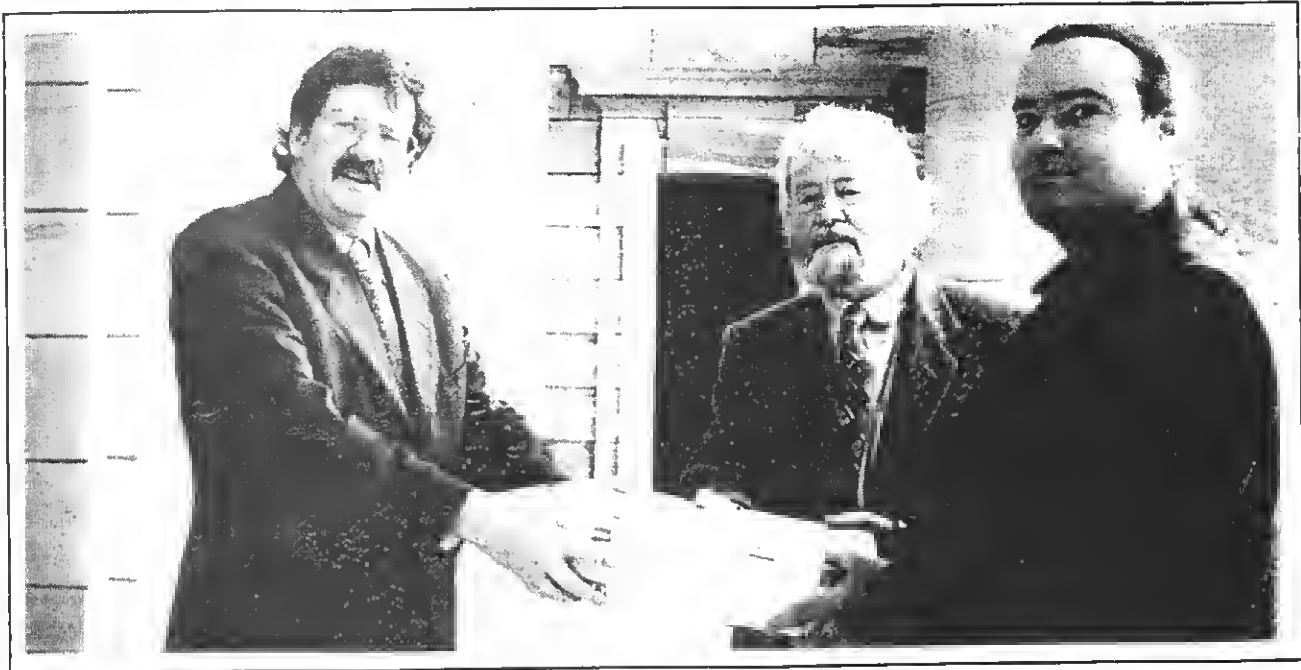
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NZ joins the call for the release of Xanana Gusmão cautiously



Joe Buchanan (r), Colin Iles (c) ETA, Wellington present the Free East Timor Coalition petition to Alliance MP Matt Robson (l) at Parliament. The petition urges the Government to support self determination for East Timor

On 10 September Minister of Foreign Affairs, Don McKinnon released a statement which said: "The United Nations Secretary General and the Indonesian Government have acknowledged the key role that Xanana Gusmão has to play in the settlement process and the future leadership of East Timor. In that context we would welcome his release and have told the Indonesian Government of our view."

The New Zealand statement came on the heels

of a visit by the New Zealand Jakarta Ambassador to Xanana Gusmão in Cipinang Prison and followed by three weeks a very similarly worded statement from Australia's Foreign Minister Downer.

ETIC Auckland wrote to Mr McKinnon welcoming this policy change and urging the Government to press for Xanana's immediate release without preconditions as well as seeking Indonesia's agreement to a referendum on self-determination. *

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